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Living Healthy Saved My Life!

My family has always had a busy lifestyle. My husband and I are very involved in our children's lives and our community, and both work full-time jobs. I have always focused on healthy choices when planning meals and remained as active as possible with walking, bike riding, floor exercises, and running. Last year, I learned how much those good habits really paid off for me!

In September 2013, my health suddenly took a turn for the worse when I developed viral encephalitis. I could not walk, could not use my hands, could not eat, my eyes shook in my head, and I had a very high temperature. It took some time for doctors to determine exactly what was wrong, but this all resulted from West Nile Virus. That's right – a mosquito bite resulted in an 8-day hospital stay and more than 4 months off work!

During the next few months, I did physical and occupation therapy to build up enough strength to walk and use my hands again. The doctors were optimistic about my recovery because of my healthy lifestyle. My eating choices, combined with my active lifestyle and exercise, had kept me strong enough to fight the virus. They explained to me that the virus and encephalitis had taken me a long way down. I couldn't imagine how much worse off I could have been if I had been overweight, not physically fit, a smoker, or had any kind of chronic condition. Someone with those risk factors would probably not have come out of the situation as well as I did.

This past summer, we experienced another family medical emergency when my husband started having chest and arm pains while mowing the lawn. Even though he had never had high blood pressure and his cholesterol levels were always within the normal ranges, we recognized the seriousness of the symptoms and got him to his doctor. Not only was there 100% blockage in his "widow maker" artery, it was also collecting blood clots and quivering, ready to burst at any time!

I have become an even bigger and more vocal advocate of healthy choice in my family's lifestyle. My husband is now reading food labels, eating more fresh fruits and vegetables, and exercising with me. We are both doing well now. I continue to eat healthy and have been able to increase my running. It makes me feel better, stronger, and able to chase after my young grandchildren. I am such a believer in the wellNEssoptions program and its value for the State of Nebraska workforce. I hope that my story, and the success stories of others, serves as a springboard for those who are on the fence about healthy choices.